

News Release

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service

For Immediate Release

Contact: Melinda Brakie
Assistant Manager
Phone: (936)-564-4873
Nacogdoches, Texas

East Texas Plant Materials Center Releases Pilgrim Germplasm Velvet Panicum

In September 2007, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) East Texas Plant Materials Center (ETPMC) released Pilgrim Germplasm velvet panicum (*Dichanthelium scoparium*). This is the most recent plant release of the ETPMC and provides a velvet panicum adapted to east Texas and potentially the southeastern United States.

The ETPMC Technical Committee recommended that seed of panicum species be collected by NRCS Field office personnel. The Technical Committee is composed of people in east Texas and Louisiana who are active in conservation and plant science activities. They identify plant species for collection that would address conservation needs in this region. The original seed of Pilgrim Germplasm was collected in Camp County, Texas by Ann Saam, an NRCS employee. Pilgrim Germplasm was selected from among 33 collections from east Texas.



The collections were evaluated for vigorous growth and seed production. Plants are tested to determine the area of adaptation for climate and soils. During a three-year evaluation, Pilgrim Germplasm performed better than 'Tioga', a commercial cultivar from the northeastern United States. Currently, seed is not available for purchase. However, foundation seed of Pilgrim Germplasm has been distributed to a commercial grower and seed will be available within the next two to three years.

Velvet panicum is a perennial bunchgrass which produces a basal rosette in the winter. In the spring, stems grow from the rosette during spring and early summer. The stems which grow to a height of 60 inches are erect and coarse. Velvet panicum is adapted to coarse and medium textured soils with a pH of 4.5 to 7.5. This species provides a source of food for songbirds, small mammals, and game birds. Wild turkey and white tailed deer graze the basal rosettes during the winter.

-more-

The ETPMC is one of three centers in Texas. The purpose of the program is to test, evaluate, and provide native plants to help solve natural resource problems. Beneficial uses of released plant materials include biomass production, carbon sequestration, erosion reduction, wetland restoration, water quality improvement, stream bank and riparian area protection, coastal dune stabilization, and other special conservation treatment needs.

Scientists at plant materials centers seek out plants that show promise for meeting an identified conservation need and test their performance. After species are proven, they are released to the private sector for commercial production and other plant material centers in the southeast United States. The work at the centers is carried out cooperatively with state and Federal agencies, commercial businesses, and seed and nursery associations.

To learn more about the plant materials center in Texas, visit our website at <http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/pmc/index.html>

#

Helping People Help the Land

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, Large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's Target Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call 800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.